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ABSTRACT

Schemas are cognitive structures or forms of thought, like pieces of ideas or concepts. Patterns in children's behavior, or in their drawings and paintings, indicate common themes or threads (schemas) running through them. The action research study described in this report examined the effects on children's learning of intervening in their curriculum at home and in early childhood settings by heightening adults' awareness of schema development. Teachers, parents, and researchers participating in the study agreed to incorporate into their curricula practices derived from schema development theories to enhance children's intellectual development. Data were collected on the way children think about both static schemas, such as "vertical," and action schemas, such as trajectories. This report focuses on a 6-month period in the lives of 10 children, ages 4 and 5, whose teachers focused on their exploration and thinking about mathematical and science-related schemas. The first chapter of the report describes the study's methodology. Chapter 2, "Connecting to Young Children's Thinking," provides some theoretical background on planned learning, how children learn to think, schemas, and studying children's schemas. Chapter 3 presents case studies and discussion on the 10 child participants, while chapter 4 describes the competency outcomes for the participant children and for comparison groups, as well as a brief discussion of how the study's competencies compare to Gardner's multiple intelligence theory. With few exceptions, outcomes were more positive for the children in the schema centers than for those in the comparison centers. Chapter 5, "Professional Learning: Curriculum Development and Innovation," discusses educators' and curriculum's role in the study results and future educational improvement. Two appendices present child observation guidelines and an observation worksheet. Contains 49 references. (EV)

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